

EI-530
MARIAN FRANK
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INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 11, 1994
AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 81
RUNNING TIME:
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.
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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE
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HUNGARY, 1913
AGE: 6 months

SHIP: THE BREMEN
PORT:
RESIDENCES:
 HUNGARY: ARAD
...US: NEW YORK, NY

HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Frank's husband, Maxwell Frank, is present.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and it's August 11th, 1994. I'm here with Marian Perlmutter Frank, who came from Hungary in 1913 when she was six months old. Let's see. So that makes you 80-

FRANK: One.

LEVINE: One. Today, the date of the interview. And Mr. Frank is- Maxwell Frank is here with us. And we're in Mr. and Mrs. Frank's apartment on 34th Street in New York City. Well, I guess life in Hungary is not something that you have any firsthand account of. But when your family-why don't you tell the background of your family and your mother coming over first and-and all that, so we get a perspective.

FRANK: Okay. I-I'll start giving you some information about my mother. Unfortunately, I do not have that much information. My mother was born in 1868 in Hungary. She was born in a town called Trentjenmadja.

LEVINE: Can you spell it?

FRANK: Mmm. Well, I guess it's T-R-E-N-T-J-E-N-M-A-D-J-A, a small town. I was born in a c-Hungary's second-largest city, which was Arad-A-R-A-D, which is now a part of Romania. We think that my mother came to the United States when she was 20 years old. After she came here, she then brought a sister and brother-in-law over. Then she brought a single

brother over. Then she brought a single sister over. And then she brought over her 16 year-old youngest sister.

LEVINE: Was she working here and sending money-

FRANK: Yes.

LEVINE: --for them to come?

FRANK: She was working here, sending money back home to bring the rest of her family to this country. There was-

LEVINE: Do you remember what she was doing?

FRANK: I think she was probably a housekeeper. She was a fabulous chef. She was just a wonderful cook. We really don't know --. Unfortunately, we never asked questions. We really don't know who she came here to visit to begin with or who might have sponsored her or what the circumstances were. At any rate, in 1912, my mother's second sister, the one next to her in age, was pregnant with her fifth child, fell on the ice. The child died and she did also. My father, who was my aunt's husband, then became a widower. The rest of the family that was in Hungary wrote my mother, who, as a single woman, to come back to Hungary to marry my father.

The circumstances that my mother issued at the time was that she would only return to Hungary and marry my father if he would agree to come back to the United States. My father then had four children, a 14-year-old, an 11-year-old, a 9-year-old and a 7-year-old. My mother then went back to Hungary in 1912, married my father, and I was born--they were married in June of 1912. I was born in April of 1913. We left and came to America in November of 1913. When we came to America, we lived in Yorkville, which was--well, 86th Street was German, but 79th Street was Hungarian and that's where we lived, 446 East 79th Street. And--

LEVINE: Well, just before you talk more about this country, what was your father doing in Hungary for work?

FRANK: My father worked for the government.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And what--was he not wanting to come to--how--what was his attitude about coming here?

FRANK: Well, even when he arrived in the United States he wanted to go back because a brother-in-law--one of my aunt's husbands that my--my mother brought over my--my aunt. Okay. And he was working in a factory. And my father was not accustomed to being locked up in a factory. And so he was not very happy at the time. And then eventually, he went into his own business. He became a window cleaner. And--

LEVINE: How about grandparents? W--were you e--ever--did you ever know them?

FRANK: Well, that's part of the mystery of my mother. No. I—we do know that my mother had gone back. Before she went back to marry my father, she had gone back twice before then, once when her father died and another time—at somebody's wedding or whatever it might have been that she went back for.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name and maiden name?

FRANK: Her name was Rozsa-R-O-Z-S-A-Saltzer-S-A-L-T-Z-E-R.

LEVINE: And what kind of a person was she? How would you describe her temperament --?

FRANK: I would describe her as the most intelligent, kind, marvelous disposition. There isn't a day goes by that I don't quote her.

LEVINE: Really? What—what kinds of things do you quote? I mean, what kind of things do you remember her saying?

FRANK: Well, things like, "It should continue to happen." If something is happening that's good, she would say, "Alavay vayter." We spoke Hungarian and German in the household.

LEVINE: In the United States.

FRANK: And then, of course, my mother knew English when she went back to—to bring the family back, to bring my father and my four sisters, who then, of course, became my sisters, back to this country. My oldest sister at the time was 15 years old and then 12, 10 and 8.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FRANK: And—

LEVINE: Can you think of anything else, attitudes your mother had—

FRANK: Yes, my mother was very kind, always doing for people. My mother became the president of the Lady's Sisterhood of the congregation that they belonged to on 78th Street in Manhattan.

LEVINE: What religion—

FRANK: We're Hebrews.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FRANK: Yeah, Jewish. My father—they belonged to an orthodox temple on 78th Street. And—

LEVINE: Okay. Through—throughout the interview, if you think of any more quotes of your mother, I think that would be very nice—

FRANK: Okay.

LEVINE: -that we carry that on.

FRANK: All right.

LEVINE: Okay. So-and how about your father? His name?

FRANK: My father's name was Emil.

LEVINE: And what do you remember about him when you think about him as a person?

FRANK: Well, I used to call my father "The Kaiser." But believe me, when I got to be an adult I realized that he was a very, very smart father. He always said to me, "I would rather see you cry now than see your mother cry later." If there were things that I felt was not fair, I wanted to do, and he did the same thing with my sisters. I remember the one next to me who's eight years older having a friend. And my father said, "You are not to see her anymore." My sister said, "Oh, yes, I will!" And he said, "Oh, no. You won't." And she didn't. She realized herself that my father was right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

FRANK: So-

LEVINE: Do you know what he wanted for you and your sisters? Do you know what-

FRANK: My father died before we were married so he never had-my father died in 1932. We were married in 1936. So he never had the opportunity to-to meet my sweetie. But my father loved music and-and he had a fabulous sense of humor along with his strict disciplinary. [chuckles] Oh, he had five girls and I guess it was important for him to keep us all on the right track. So that was a fortunate thing. He saw three of my sisters married and then two of us were married after he passed away.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you were living on 79th Street and-

FRANK: Yes.

LEVINE: D-were there a lot of-there were a lot of Hungarians.

FRANK: Yes.

LEVINE: A lot of people who had immigrated-

FRANK: Yes.

LEVINE: And in your school, was that true? Were there children who were coming over when you were in school-

FRANK: Ah-

LEVINE: -that you remember?

FRANK: Did we have—my sisters were put into the public school because of the language difficulty. [coughs] And so they were put into a lower grade. [coughs] My oldest sister never went to school. She was 15 years old and she knew how to sew at that age. And I'll tell you an interesting story about immigration with her. That when we got here the immigration officer or somebody who was doing the questioning, had taken everybody aside and said to my sister, Irene, "How much is two and two?" And she laughed in his face and they put a cross mark on her tag.

And fortunately, my mother spoke English. And my mother said to him, "Here's a girl who has already finished gymnasium, which is high school." And then, of course, they did question her and that was fine. Then they had a little—I have a—a—also have a paper on my sister, Olga. She and my sister, Ella, had been popping popcorn in Hungary and she caught—she caught on fire. She eventually rolled into a rug but she had a scar under her chin. And before they left Hungary, my mother was afraid that there might be some difficulty with Immigration. So she had the r—the doctor write out a complete report so that there would be no difficulty with coming in with the whole family into the United States. She was bright. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, yeah. Now, do you remember the ship that you—

FRANK: Yes.

LEVINE: -and your family came on?

FRANK: We came on the Bremen.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And let's see. Is there anything else that your sisters told you about Hungary that you recall?

FRANK: Well, I know they all went to school. My sister, Rose, tells an interesting story about selling water in the theater af—after school. How much of it, I don't know. The thing that, of course, bothers all—bothered all of us is that we really never asked my mother, "What did you do when you got here? Who did—who asked you to come? Why did you leave Hungary and a big family?" And the reason I say I think my mother didn't leave until after the—her younger sister was born, of course—at one time I had said to her, "How is that you always talk about your father and very little about your mother?" And she said, "My mother was always pregnant."

And I guess if you're a—if you're the oldest of 13 children, you wind up actually taking care of the rest of the family, which, of course, she did when she came to this country by bringing over—there were s—there were two sisters who—one sister who was married and had a family of her—of her own. And eventually, after we were here, my mother brought over her oldest son. So that's another thing that we always did. The remainder of the family was a single sister and a brother and then this married sister and her husband and family. But we always, when we started—my sister started to work and then when I started to work, we

always had to give my mother money so that she could send it back to Hungary to take care of them. So—

LEVINE: You mentioned your mother was an excellent cook.

FRANK: Marvelous.

LEVINE: Do—do you remember any Hungarian dishes that she continued to make in this country?

FRANK: That I continue to make.

LEVINE: And you continue.

FRANK: Yes.

LEVINE: That's even better.

FRANK: Not now.

LEVINE: What are those?

FRANK: Not now, since we're on a high cholesterol diet.

LEVINE: [laughs]

FRANK: But we always made a chicken paprikash. That's—

LEVINE: Yeah, explain.

FRANK: —paprika chicken. And a veal dish and then the dessert is still made by all Hungarians, polichenta. Actually, it's a crepe that's filled with cheese and raisins and—and then the crepes are filled with apricot jelly. So my moth—my mother was a wonderful cook and a marvelous baker. We had a buffet in our house in the dining room. And every Friday night from that en—one end to the other end, it was filled with all the baked—baked goods that she made. My mother had a coal stove in 7-- 79th Street. And when the gas stove came in, she would not give up that coal stove because the baking, evidently, was fabulous in the coal stove. So she had the coal stove next to the [chuckles]—

LEVINE: Gas stove. [chuckles]

FRANK: —the—the gas stove. So—

LEVINE: Do—do you remember—could you describe where you lived on—on 79th Street?

FRANK: Yes.

LEVINE: What it looked like and—

FRANK: It was a—what do they call the apartment?

LEVINE: Tenement?

FRANK: No, it was not a tenement.

LEVINE: No?

FRANK: It was a brown-

LEVINE: Brownstone?

FRANK: What do they call the brownstones. It was a brownstone that had been—evidently at one time might have been a one-family house. But there were two, four, six apartments in the house. It was almost like a railroad because we had an entrance at—at the parlor, which was not a living room; it was a parlor—and an entrance at the kitchen. And all—and then you walked through all of the rooms. And the bedrooms had airshafts.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Is that building still there?

FRANK: No.

LEVINE: No.

FRANK: It's not. There's—there's—there's one—there's a building next to it, which was not a brownstone—it was a little different—that belonged to a doctor. And when he died, he left that building to a—to his housekeeper. And, no, where I—where 446 was, it's an apartment house now. There were two of the—

LEVINE: Wh—where was it? Between what and what?

FRANK: It was then between what was called Avenue A, which is now called York Avenue.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

FRANK: Between Avenue A and First Avenue. And it was a very busy and beautiful street. We had a big church across the street. And—but there was no such thing as being an immigrant. Everybody, I think, was an immigrant because the—we had a church, St. Monica's, across the street. And then around the corner from that there was a German church. And my closest girlfriend was a G—a German girl. And—

LEVINE: What other—

FRANK: —I went—the school that I went to was P.S. 158 on 78th Street and First Avenue. And it's still there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FRANK: And I only went to that school to 4A because it really should have been a boys' school all along. But they didn't know what to do with the little girls so we started kindergarten in that school to 4A. And

then we moved to P.S. 96, which was at 81st Street and Second Avenue, I think. And believe it or not, that school, I had a very, very close friend, Ethelyn Herd [PH]. And she was a black girl. I think they were—her father was a schoolteacher in either Jamaica or Haiti. I'm not sure. But I don't think anybody on 79th Street had ever been a black—seen a black child before. When I brought her home for lunch, of course, my mother welcomed her with open arms. And everybody wanted to know, "My God. What—what is all this about?" But there was such a close association. They were tenement houses on the—on the street. See, there—we—there were no houses from Avenue A to the doctor's house. And then it was two brownstones and we lived in one and there was another one. And then there were tenements and our grocery store was on that street.

LEVINE: You mean the grocery store your father—

FRANK: No, no.

LEVINE: No.

FRANK: Just the store, the grocery store that we shopped in.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FRANK: And—and we had—we had a telephone, one of the first telephones on the street. [chuckles] That's why you pointed to me.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Uh-huh.

FRANK: And when—and everybody was told if anybody wants to call, so whenever anybody called, I remember running out of the house and say, "Come to the house. There's a telephone call for you."

LEVINE: [chuckles]

FRANK: Like crazy. But it was a wonderful experience as a kid. And then, of course, I had Central Park.

LEVINE: Tell me about that.

FRANK: So—

LEVINE: What that was like for a little girl—

FRANK: Yes.

LEVINE: —growing up.

FRANK: Central Park. We spent our summers—we didn't have to worry about being on the street because the streets were fine. All the kids got along. And then we went to Central Park for the Goldman bands that were there all summer. You're too young to remember that.

LEVINE: Tell me about it.

FRANK: But you had the most fabulous music in the park and the park was a wonderful place to go to. So this is where we spent the summers on the street, on 79th Street and in the park playing the games that we played. When I tell my grandchildren that we used to eat a peach and then take the peach pit and rub the peach pit on the concrete of the stoop and make rings out of the peach pit, that's almost like an impossible thing that kids did. And then we played stoopball and we'd jump rope. So—and we also had a Victrola in the house and so we had wonderful music. My parents loved wonderful music so we had wonderful music.

A lot of things, I guess, that we couldn't afford. My older sister then became a blouse designer. And then I started to say before, that my sisters were started in very-1A or—at that time, you had 1A and 1B and 2A and 2B. But they moved up very quickly because they were well educated in Hungary. Even the youngest, who was between seven and eight years old when she came. My sisters just graduated from grade school but all of them were very bright, became very successful businesswomen. And so I'm the only one who went to high school. I went to Julia Richmond High School. It was a brand new building. Mine was the first graduating class in 1930.

LEVINE: And where is that located?

FRANK: It's at 60—between 67th and 68th Street on Second Avenue. It's still there.

LEVINE: How about English? Now, did your mother—your mother already knew English when—

FRANK: Yes.

LEVINE: —when she married your father. And—and you must have learned English. You were speaking German and Hungarian at home?

FRANK: Right.

LEVINE: So did you know both?

FRANK: But—but both my mother and my father said immediately, "We will talk English." And that's how—that's how they got started, all of us, knowing that this—this is the language of the land. When I was 16 years old, I was a little sick girl. (paper shuffling) And the reason I'm telling you this is because you want to know what happens with foreigners. My father wrote me some wonderful letters.

LEVINE: Oh—

FRANK: And I knew that we would start out—he would start out his letters with a dictionary. Here's a letter that he wrote in 1929.

LEVINE: Well, now, he was writing to you?

FRANK: He was writing to me because I was up in the country recuperating. I had meningitis.

LEVINE: Do you want to read it?

FRANK: Do I want to read it? Okay.

LEVINE: Okay.

FRANK: Now, s—since he didn't find my name in the dictionary, he writes, "Dear Mancy." M-A-N-C-Y, the way he said my name. "I received your letter and card today at 4:30 p.m. Now, I am writing to you, as I promised to write everyday. But really, I don't know what to write. I'm feeling fine. Also, Mother and the rest of the family. Marilyn"—that's my niece—"was sleeping at our house last night. She was very gut." G-U-T. "Now, I see when—at this sentence I find that the dictionary"—he got tired out and he said, "Irene tuk"—T-U-K—"har"—H-A-R—her—"home now. That is all what I have to write. Many kisses to you. Papa." And now, he wrote—I have many of the letters that he wrote that are really precious because he starts out by writing in English. And he gets tired of the English and he then—and he—I realize that he can't use the dictionary anymore.

And then he writes in German and then he writes—of course, I was 16 years old then. And I had already taken French and German in high school. So that the German that—that I listened to at home was not the same as what I learned in high school. And so I—I was able to read his letters and have no difficulty with them. But these were all just wonderful things. But my parents always, when they had something to talk about, they spoke in German. And my father was not born in Hungary. Actually, it was Hungary because it was Austria Hungary. He was born in Lenberg, which is Lvov today in Poland. The city that my mother was born in is part of Czechoslovakia or—so that—that's what happened with that entire Austrian Hungary picture, because actually, I was born in Hungary but it was Austria Hungary at the time, the whole thing. Now, what else can I tell you?

LEVINE: Let's see. So you graduated high school.

FRANK: I graduated high school.

LEVINE: You were the first one in the family to do so.

FRANK: Yes.

LEVINE: Was that an event for the family?

FRANK: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Your graduation?

FRANK: Well, everything in our family was a party. My mother was a party girl. And we also knew that we had to go to visit our aunts and uncle. She had one brother and three sisters. Well, once—well, the—

well, all of them were married. It was just—we knew that to my mother, the word family was something that was so important and so precious that I think she did a good job in brain-washing me. [laughter] Because we have a wonderful family. Now, (paper shuffling) my mother was never anxious to go back to Europe. She felt that there was nothing like America.

LEVINE: And your father?

FRANK: Oh, it—my father then became accustomed to the country and had no problem. It was just at the beginning when he couldn't find himself. And then he was able to adjust himself. And he had a lot of Hungarian friends, very close. There was a coffee house right on Second Avenue and 79th Street. It was called the Abazia. What a funny name. How do I remember that?

LEVINE: It—can you spell it? A-B—

FRANK: A-B-A-Z-Z-A. I don't know. Something of the sort.

LEVINE: Is that a Hungarian word, do you think?

FRANK: I really don't know. It could be. But he and all his cronies used to have coffee and that's where they went for their coffee klatches.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: And what did they do for—was the social life mainly with the neighborhood and the—and—and the family?

FRANK: Yes. When we—when we came, my mother had joined an organization called Arad esh Vittiky [PH], which was the city that I was born in and the surrounding area. And with that organization, the doc—there was a doctor available to you. The doctor came to the house. The doctor made the medication, if there was any medication needed. The doctor was like a psychiatrist today, because if you had any problems you just talked to him about it.

LEVINE: Was he a Hungarian doctor?

FRANK: He was a Hungarian, yes. I don't remember his name.

LEVINE: What was the organization? It was Arad and what was the rest of it?

FRANK: Esh means and. Vittiky. I don't know how to spell the word but it—it—I—from what I understand, it was the vicinity around the city of Arad. And there was a certain amount of dues that you paid into it. And if anybody needed a—a helping hand in finding an apartment or g—even getting their own little business started, it was almost like a loan association, so that you were still dealing with people who came from your area who were in the same situation that you were, new Americans trying to bring up a family. And if you needed any money to get started,

and then you always paid it back. So the--there was a closeness. So I guess in the modern language somehow or other, people seemed to call ethnic vicinities ghettos. And to me, the word ghetto is not a bad word. It's a beautiful word because it enabled people to feel comfortable until they were able to learn the language and their children were able to get an education, to speak their own language and to reminisce about the lives that they led--

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FRANK: --in Europe.

LEVINE: Are you--are you referring to in this country too? Or you--

FRANK: That--that's where this was, right here in this country.

LEVINE: So--

FRANK: This organization.

LEVINE: I see.

FRANK: It was not in Europe.

LEVINE: So you t--but you were say--when you're talking about a ghetto, you're--you're saying that what you're talking about--

FRANK: Yes.

LEVINE: --was referred to in that way.

FRANK: Well, I would say that because I remember very distinctly that 78th Street between Avenue A and First Avenue was all Bohemian. And 79th Street had a lot of Hungarians but we also had Irish on that street. And there was --as I said, St. Monica's Church was on that street; 86th Street was all German. So it was a--a melting pot but everybody seemed to get along.

LEVINE: Did your family have any use of the organization, the Arad --

FRANK: Yes, we used the doctor. So--I don't remember using him because I guess I did when I was small, since I was only six months old when I came here. But I remember my mother talking about him because, fortunately, she was a very strong woman and very well. I don't ever remember my mother being sick at all. So when--in, let's see, what year was that? I guess I was either four or five years old. My mother stepped off the curb and got a compound fracture of her ankle. And then--that--the hospital was over on what was then called Welfare Island, which is now Roosevelt Island. And there--there was a hospital there. And she was in that hospital for several weeks. My sister, Irene, of course, was about 20 years old at the time. She was not married. I think Irene was married when she was 21. And all of the--the baking for my sister's wedding was done at home and then taken to the temple. It was just--what

was called in those days a sweet table. Of course, it was almost—it was all desserts and wine. My mother used to make her own wine.

LEVINE: In this country?

FRANK: In this country, yes. She made her own wine.

LEVINE: Oh, do you remember that?

FRANK: Do I remember that? Yes. Concord grapes that had to be—they didn't—we didn't step on them but they had to be crushed to make wine. Oh, a lot of things that were made in the house. My father used to bring home fish, white fish and carp and put them in the bathtub.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

FRANK: Then my mother would take her rolling pin, which I still have, and a cleaver, which was called a hakmeser That's a cleaver, put it on and cut the head of the—everything was made at home. There was nothing that was cooked or made on the outside, so that all the cooking and baking and—from—from scratch. We don't live that way anymore.

LEVINE: So did—did you—you and your sisters learn to cook from your mother?

FRANK: Yes. Yes, all of us.

LEVINE: And how about becoming citizens? Did your mother and father become a citizen?

FRANK: Yes. We were all citizens under my father's paper, except my sister, Irene. She became a citizen when she was—when she was married. She was married when she was—let's see, there's 15 years. She's 15 years older than I am. And I was her flower girl. I was eight years old. So what year was that? 1921 when—

LEVINE: Was it—

FRANK: —she was married.

LEVINE: Was it a Hungarian-type wedding?

FRANK: Yes, it was a Hungarian-type wedding. And everybody did the czardas , which is a Hungarian dance. And yes, as a matter of fact, we still do a czardas at all of our Hung—all of our children's weddings. So an amazing—

LEVINE: Is it a line dance? Is that what it—

FRANK: It's not a line dance. It's—

LEVINE: What—

FRANK: -two people together. And it-it is the official Hungarian dance, a czardas. And you hear that very often in music too. If I find a funny old picture, I'll show you me -I'll show you me in costume.

LEVINE: Oh. Well, now, what would be an occasion where you would wear the costume?

FRANK: Some celebration. It could have been-it could have been a costume that I wore for Purim, which is a-a Jewish holiday. [rustling paper sound] Oh. I really ought to have-sort these things. [chuckles] I've got them here and there and all over.

LEVINE: It's better that we don't talk while you're rustling the papers.

FRANK: Okay.

LEVINE: It's [unclear] coming on the machine.

FRANK: Yeah, because you hear that then. But the-the-the costume is a-a jacket and the Hungarian flag, red, white and green in ribbon is on your skirt so that you know that this is a Hungarian costume.

LEVINE: Should we pause? Do you want to look through those? Do you want to pause? Because I'm just afraid your talk will be interfered with with the rustle.

FRANK: Well, I won't look through them then because I thought I had it separate.

LEVINE: Okay. So we'll take them away from you. [laughs]

FRANK: Yeah. [chuckles]

LEVINE: It's too tempting. Okay. So-so you had a costume. Did-did your older sisters also have one or were you-

FRANK: I don't think so. I think it was just because I was the baby.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

FRANK: But no, we all-always had Hungarian music on and-

LEVINE: Yeah, I was going to ask you that question. What-I mean, you've already mentioned some things. But can you think of any other customs that your family carried to this country? And also, on the other hand, ways that they became Americanized.

FRANK: Well, I think that there are always things from your background that you really do retain somehow or other. And just recently, I had the occasion to-to see how much more of Hungarian-I'll be able to correspond with our oldest grandson. He has a fellowship at Columbia University for Mid-European History. And last year, he was in

Germany for seven weeks and this year, he just came back now, August 1st. He was in Hungary. He must learn the language thoroughly, German and Hungarian. And it's very possible it might also be Russian. But at any rate, when he started at Columbia, he said, "Hey, Grandma. How about coming to school with me?" So I did go up. The—the first day that he went up to Columbia to start learning Hungarian. And I realized immediately that I was able to—to say—I could understand the teacher and I could say some words to her.

Of course, after all, it is a long time since any of us, even my sisters and I have done any talking or listening to Hungarian. And then I realized immediately that what he had to learn was the language grammatically. And no way would I know the language grammatically. And even now, when he says anything to—I say something to him and then he'll say, "Well, Grandma, it has to be the past tense or the"—whatever it might be. And so I have gotten some mail from him from Hungary because he was able to get in touch with a Hungarian family there, although he did not live with them. [clears throat] And he had tutors who were teaching him Hungarian. And so when I started a letter to him, I would start out and I said in the letter, "I started this letter in Hungarian but I really haven't got the patience that my father had"—

LEVINE: [chuckles]

FRANK: —"using a dictionary. And so I will now quit and write in English," which is what I did.

LEVINE: How do you feel, having your grandson now be—

FRANK: Oh, I love it.

LEVINE: To have come full circle that way?

FRANK: I really love it. And I think that you need a lot of patience. It's a difficult language because it doesn't have a Latin base and—or a Germanic base. I guess they say the only language that's similar is the Finns, Finland. So—but I never heard that as a kid. I always heard that the Hungarian language was impossible. [laughter] And so—but he did very well with it. And now I just said to him he really has to find somebody here that—he had the opportunity with, not only this family but they had a friend who was lear—trying to learn English. So he would—she would say something to him in English and he would correct it—and then he would say something in Hungarian to her and she would correct it. So that's about the best way when you're living with a language to learn the language. Otherwise, it's very difficult.

LEVINE: Hmm. Can you—do you have any sense of the fact that you were born in Hungary and came here such an early age, and then your family had—were Hungarian, do—how do you think that's influenced your whole life? The fact of—of your family coming from Hungary and—and—as immigrants and—and living in this country?

FRANK: Well, I think that there's a great deal that we learn from that. In the first place, we learn that we had to be giving, that you

are not alone in this world. And we couldn't take things for granted. There was no such thing as welfare that you have today. Or there was no such thing as -- you must continue in education and you're entitled to it, that your parents have to-. So I think that the fact that I have had a foreign background has influenced our entire family. So that we have three daughters and we have 11 grandchildren. And thank God, we're a very close family. And I really think that the foreign background had a lot to do with it. It-

LEVINE: It-do you think it-it-it brought you closer in some way? What do you think that influence was, that foreign-the fact that you-

FRANK: I don't know. It's really very hard to define because my husband's family ca-my husband's original family, they came from Alsace Lorraine and Germany, Frankfurt. So-but I think that there were several generations that were here already, so that the-I mean, the foreign language, even as far as an accent in-in speaking. I never realized that my oldest sister-a few people said to me that-that Irene does have an accent. I never heard it because she was always talking English. But I guess she spoke Hungarian longer than anybody else, and German. Both languages were taught in school so that my sisters learned both languages when they were very young, which is what we did not do in this country. In this country, we started languages in high school and I think that's wrong. Languages should be taught in elementary school because the capacity for learning is much greater when you're younger.

LEVINE: Now, your husband's name is Maxwell Frank.

FRANK: Yes.

LEVINE: And tell me how you met him.

FRANK: Well, when I started to work, I worked-I started to work in 1930 for a textile house. My brother-in-law, my oldest sister's husband, was a salesman for this company. And after I finished school I went to an Elliot Fisher [PH] school in June to learn a bookkeeping machine. And I got a job as a bookkeeper in this company. And in 1931, when my husband asked a friend of his father's (his-my husband's father was dead also, and my father was also) and he asked him about a job and he sent him to this textile company. And he came to work for the Chopak Textile. I think Chopak-C-H-O-P-A-K. They were one of the pioneers in the textile business at that time. They made rayon and their office was right here at 468 Fourth Avenue, which is now called Park Avenue South. You notice that I'm telling you about a na-a change in name of every area in-

LEVINE: Yes. That's-

FRANK: [chuckles]

LEVINE: -so interesting.

FRANK: It's almost impossible to-to say, "Well, this was here then and it's not here now." At any rate, my husband came to work and he had-he was working with the credit man in the place and I was in the

bookkeeping department. And then I'll tell you a secret. My husband went home and he said to his mother, "There's a girl in the place and I'm going to marry her." Of course, we were kind of young at the time. So-

LEVINE: How old were you?

FRANK: -that was 1930. I was-I graduated school in '17. My husband graduated in '18. And this was tough times in New York. Don't forget, we had the Great Depression. I'll tell you a funny story about that Depression. When my youngest daughter's son was in-in high school, he had a project on the Great Depression. So he came to interview his grandparents. And he made up all the questions himself and the questions were wonderful. And then one of the questions that he asked, he said, "What did you do for entertainment?" So I said, "Oh, Robert. We talked to one another but we also had movies and we also had Victrolas."

And oddly enough, we had a radio in our house on 79th Street that this cousin of mine, who was the last one that my mother brought over from Europe, her sister's son, David-and he built a crystal radio for us. The whole thing was open and you could see all the crystals and the bulbs. And it was one of the few radios on the street that we lived down at the time. And so I told Robert that we were able to have some social life and some entertainment. [chuckles] Of course, it's difficult for kids to understand that you haven't got a television and a radio and a VCR and-and everything else that goes with it that's-that's in today's world that, of course, we did not have.

LEVINE: Well, your family must have -

FRANK: So-

LEVINE: -been somewhat comfortable. Because you had the telephone?

FRANK: Yes.

LEVINE: And you also-

FRANK: We had-yes.

LEVINE: -had a radio?

FRANK: Yes. Well, not only that my father was working but then my sisters all went to work.

LEVINE: Oh.

FRANK: So [clears throat] everybody brought home-we moved from 79th street [coughs] to Brooklyn when I was 16 years old. The reason that we moved was because my father was very active in his temple and he had a heart condition. And at that point, our family doctor was the rabbi's son. And he said, "You've got to get out of here because all of this aggravation and the work that he's doing in the temple and everything else is --". And so we moved to Brooklyn. The reason we moved to Brooklyn is that my sister, Ella, was married and lived in Brooklyn at

the time. And then my sister, Irene, when she had been married, she lived up on University Place [sic] in New York, which was then considered "the country" because there was an apartment house that was built up there then that was, like, out in the wilderness. And then she also moved to Brooklyn. And-

LEVINE: Now, University Place, that's not downtown [unclear]-

FRANK: Not downtown. It was way uptown where I think-I think NYU has a college up there and so does Fordham University. And there were no buildings up there at the time. That's where the university was and their campus up there. But don't forget. That's 1921 when she moved up there.

LEVINE: Well, now, when you moved to Brooklyn, was that country?

FRANK: No, we lived very close to Prospect Park. And there were a lot of private houses but we moved into an apartment house. And-

LEVINE: Now, you said about-your husband realized he wanted to marry you. What did you like about him?

FRANK: Well, I was a little nervous about even going out with him because there was so much Monday morning quarterback talk in the place. There were-we had a lot of people in the place and young boys and young girls. And somehow or other, the whole place really wound up as a marriage agency.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

FRANK: The boss married the switchboard operator and then another boss married a secretary. And then one of the boys married the girl who then became the switchboard operator. [chuckles] And it was just-but we did have a wonderful company picnic with another textile company in 1932. And that was the year that the Empire State was built. We came back from Schmidt's [PH] Farms way up in, I guess around Westchester someplace. And-and one of the girls who worked in the place, and one of the young men who did, and my husband and I went up to the-in the tower of the Empire State. And I must tell you that many times I had said to my mother, "How will I know?" And my mother used to say to me, "You'll know. You'll know." And that's where I got my first kiss, the top of the Empire State. And I came home and I said to my mother, "I know." So now you know how I knew. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. That's wonderful. Now, you have three children? What are their names?

FRANK: Yes, Eleanor, Rosalie and Carol. I lost my mother when I was in my eighth month with my second child. My mother lived with us when we were married. And my mother had never been sick a day in her life. She was dead in four days. And the doctor said to me, "We would like to do an autopsy." And I said, "Oh, God, no." Because, you know, you just have horror dreams about autopsies. And he shook his finger at me and he said-and that was so typical of everybody knowing what my mother was

like, "If your mother knew that she could save one life." I said, "Okay." My mother had—my mother died from pneumococcus meningitis.

And after that—oddly enough, I had meningitis when I was 16 years old and this doctor saved my life because he was a—he was at a university in Michigan. And there was a—a—an Army camp nearby. And there was an epidemic of meningitis then. And we had just moved to Brooklyn and did not have a doctor. And my older sister knew a doctor that she had gone to who was a nose and throat man. And he said to her—you know, he was a specialist; he wouldn't come out. And he said, "A young guy just opened an office on the corner of the street that I'm on." He was on Ocean Parkway—Ocean Avenue in Brooklyn. And so he sent Dr. Greenfield to the house. And the day before, there was a doctor on the street that we lived on, Empire Boulevard, and my mother had called him in. And he thought that I had typhoid fever.

And then my mother had also called our doctor from New York to come out. And he said, "I think I know what Muncie [PH] has but I don't know. You better get somebody else." And fortunately, when Dr. Greenfield walked in, because of the experience that he had had at—at an Army camp, recognizing—and so he almost lost his license by taking me into the Brooklyn Jewish Hospital, because all contagious diseases went into King's Country at the time. And—but he did save my life. But when I was moved out, I was blind and paralyzed. My body had already turned black. And he did a job. And so here I am. [chuckles] And now, why did I get to talk about that?

LEVINE: Let's see. We were talking about your mother—

FRANK: Oh, my children.

LEVINE: —died and—and the doctor said there should be an autopsy.—

FRANK: Yes, yes. And so my—my mother's name was Rosa and my middle daughter's name is Rosalie. And our youngest daughter's name is Carol. Our oldest daughter has three ch—three sons. The middle one has five children and the younger one has three. Now, the youngest of all of our grandchildren is 19 years old. We have one, two, three, four married. Okay. We have three great-grandchildren. So we have quite a family. And I think that the—this whole rigmarole of knowing what a family is, we've tried very hard to follow through on that with all of our family and of our kids also. Yeah.

LEVINE: What—what do you feel either most proud of or most grateful for in your life, would you say?

FRANK: Well, I guess I'm more—I'm grateful every single day for living and living a beautiful life. I'm grateful for him. (sound of pats)

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything you'd like to say before we close?

FRANK: Well, God bless America.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, thank you very much. I've been talking with Marian Perlmutter Frank, who came from Hungary as an infant, six months old, in 1913. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

FRANK: Thank you very much.

LEVINE: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

EI-530/FRANK